

Middleborough Antiquarian

Devoted to the preservation of local history by
MIDDLEBOROUGH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

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FALL 1994

NUMBER 2



Four Generations of Thatchers

A FAMILY PORTRAIT taken around 1882 shows four generations of Thatcher men, prominent figures in early Middleborough history: (left to right) Allen Crocker Thatcher, Henry L. Thatcher, Allan R. Thatcher, and Levi Peirce Thatcher. Born in 1783, the elder Thatcher was approaching 100 years old when he sat for the family portrait in a Middleborough studio.

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A Message from the President

Even though we still do not have an Editor for the Middleborough Antiquarian, the appeal for articles for this and future issues has been gratifying, and we can keep going for awhile. BUT, we still need more! We certainly appreciate the help of Bob Barboza in preparing this issue for publication.

Best wishes to all of you from Gladys and me for the Holiday Season and 1995.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Beals, President

MIDDLEBOROUGH ANTIQUARIAN

Middleboro, Mass.

VOLUME XXXII FALL 1994 NUMBER 2

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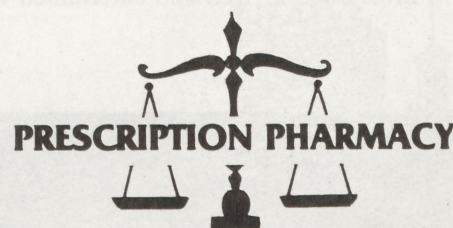
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The Young Mechanic No. 6

by Robert M. Beals

During the last week of October, 1979, this fine example of an antique fire engine was returned to Middleborough. This was as the result of negotiations between Ted Eayrs, Jr., who was Director of the Middleborough Historical Museum at the time and the late Franklin Reed. The rig had been stored at the Jacobs Farm in Norwell for many years. It had served on the Middleborough Fire Department, after being purchased from the City of New Bedford in 1864, and was quartered in a building on Oak Street near the corner of High Street.

The history of the "Young Mechanic No. 6" goes back to 1854 when it was delivered to New Bedford.

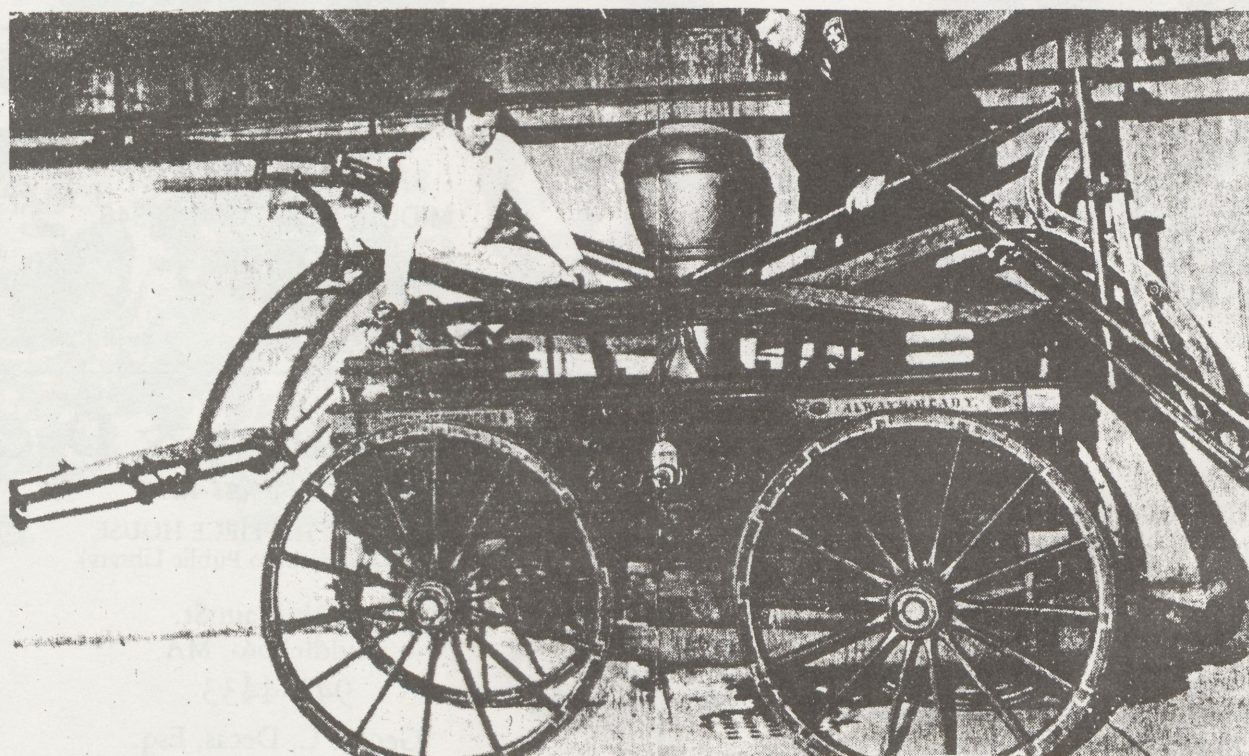
According to the "History of the New Bedford Fire Department," published in 1890, the morning of September 27, 1854 was a very exciting one. The day had come, and with it the new machine from Philadelphia. For twenty years, the John Agnew firm had furnished fire engines to the fire department, and they had in every instance given the highest satisfaction.

The company met at the engine house on Purchase Street at 7:00 AM, arrayed in new uniforms of red shirts, faced and trimmed with blue, belts, blue caps and black trousers. The New Bedford Brass Band arrived and entertained with fine

music, as the company of 47 men rolled the veteran engine from the house. After a parade through some of the main streets, the Old Mechanic was taken to a building on North Second Street, which was a repository for engines to be placed in reserve status. The faithful and venerable machine was given three hearty cheers as a parting gesture. The line of march then continued to the freight depot.

All expectations were fully met when the new engine was drawn from the freight car and brought to the gaze of the admiring crowd. It was built on the well-known model of the Agnew make, 8-inch cylinder, length of stroke 8½ inches, and furnished with all the "modern appliances then known." The engine was a double-decker with extension brakes, a powerful suction, and all the qualities of a first-class engine. It was elegantly mounted with polished brass, and painted in excellent taste. On either side of the tower appeared the name, "Young Mechanic," with the company motto "Always Ready," and that of the State, "Ense petit," etc., handsomely wrought.

A new hose carriage, built by Gray & Barker, with iron work by Joseph Brownell & Co. was a fitting companion to the new engine.



TAKING STOCK of the antique pumper once used in Middleborough are (left to right) former museum director Ted Eayrs, Jr. and firefighter Philip Hollis. (Clint Clark Photo)

The Young Mechanic...

The apparatus was pulled and pushed to the Pope Street reservoir. Later the company proceeded with the band for a demonstration near Rodman's farm, where the party was welcomed in a "hearty speech" by Hon. J.H.W. Page. When the festivities of the day were concluded, the company returned to their hall and was dismissed.

The company's record of the day closed with these words, "May the course of the Young Mechanic be as glorious and her end as pleasant as those of the namesake." The price paid was \$1,850.

The full organization of the Young Mechanic No. 6 for the year 1854 included six officers, eighty-seven firemen, and two torch-boys.

The performance of the machine gradually grew into positive dissatisfaction. When put to its regular work it failed to accomplish what was expected and promised by the builder.

Mr. Agnew visited the city on May 21, 1856, and the company worked the engine under his instructions. The verdict was, "all right at all points," and that settled the matter as far as Agnew was concerned.

However, the dissatisfaction continued and in time reached a boiling point. On August 7, 1856, the company requested the Board of Engineers to return the reserve engine to them, which was approved. A contract was then made with the William Jeffers Co. of Pawtucket, to put new works in the "No. 6." The old engine had been repaired and christened "The Veteran No. 1," and did service until the remodelled engine was returned on March 4, 1858. It was then subjected to rigorous testing at a reservoir near the Custom House where it performed satisfactorily under the direction of Mr. Jeffers.

The following is a partial list of the record of the Young Mechanic No. 6.

Feb. 5, 1855 - Fire at 6:30 PM, from the North Christian Church opposite the Parker House. Damage slight. Six out first and first water.

June 4, 1855 - Fire at piano manufactory on William St. Six out first, and Five first water.

Aug. 25, 1855 - Fire at Mountain Brow, Perry's Neck. Five out first. Six passed her and led more than two squares in going to Rodman's farm.

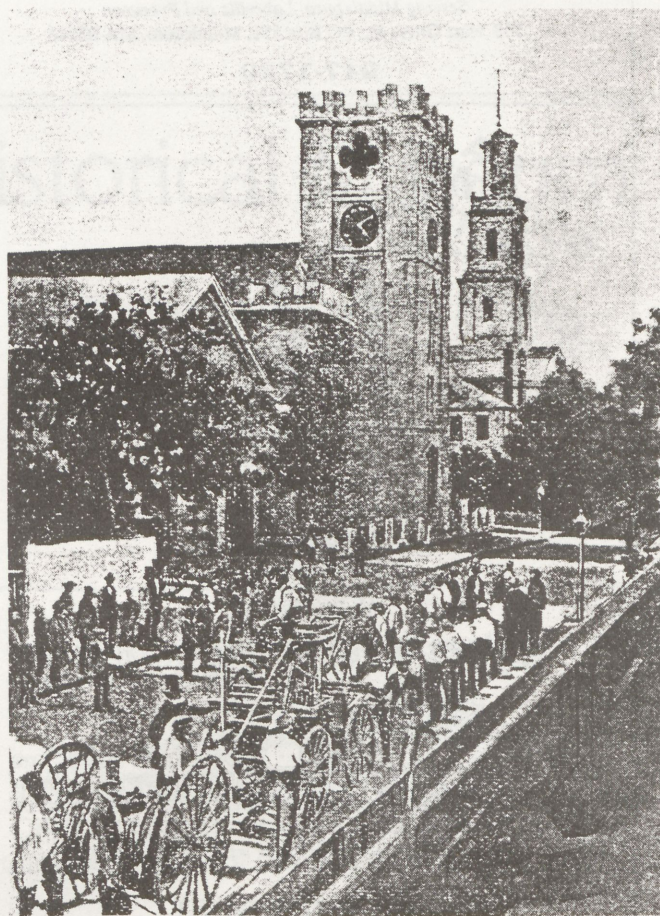
July 22, 1859 - False alarm of fire at 9:30 o'clock P.M. Five out first. Six passed her on 5th Street. Five, in attempting to pass the Six, locked wheels, so that she was under the necessity of taking off one of her wheels to get out of the mess.

The Young Mechanic No. 6 served the New Bedford Fire Dept. faithfully until 1864, when the city began the purchase of steam fire engines. It was then purchased by the Town of Middleborough. Further rebuilding was done by the Jeffers Co., and the machine was used locally until 1880.

Continued on Page 7



THIS CLOSEUP PHOTO shows some of the elaborate wood carvings that decorate the 1854 pumper acquired by the Middleborough Historical Society. (Clint Clark Photo)



YOUNG MECHANIC NO. 6 is shown in an 1855 photo returning from service battling a fire on Purchase Street.

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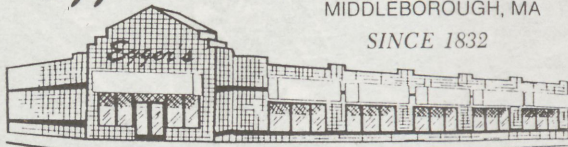


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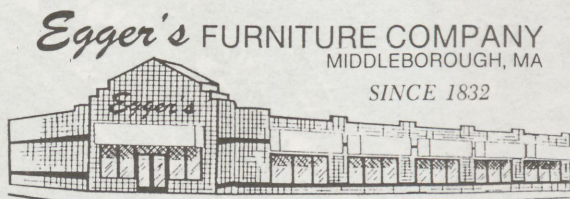
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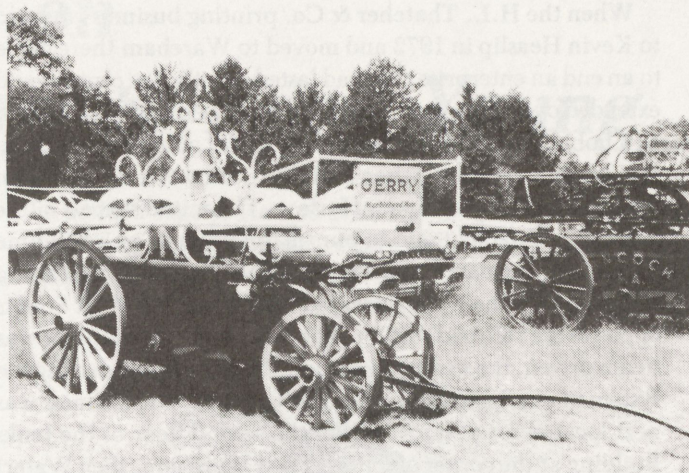
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The Young Mechanic...

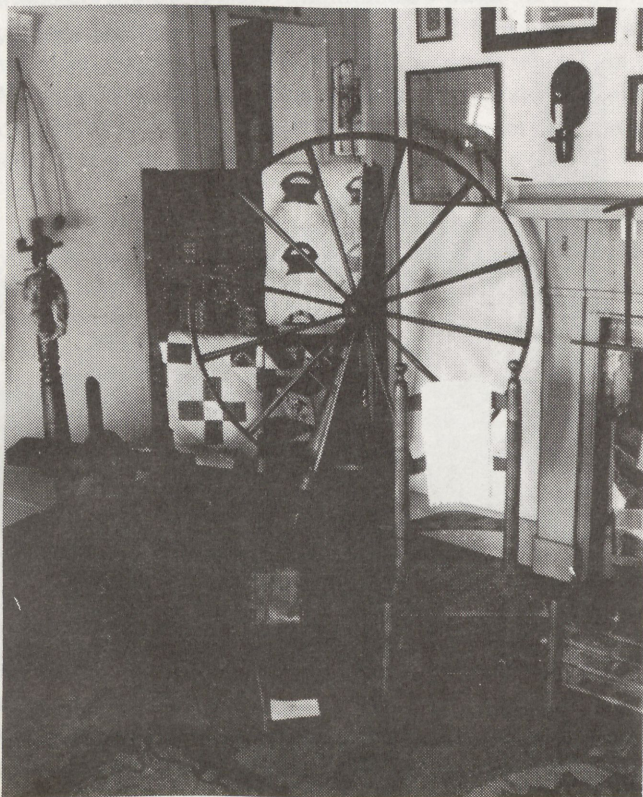
I have no knowledge of what happened to the engine from that time until about 1974 when I visited the Jacobs Farm in Norwell, after learning that several pieces of antique fire equipment were stored and on display in various buildings on the farm property. I found that most of them had been moved to the New England Fire & History Museum on Cape Cod, but the Young Mechanic No. 6 was one of those remaining. I took a picture of it, and the next time I was in Middleboro, showed it to members of the fire department, including the chief at that time. I could not seem to generate any interest at that time.

I was pleased to learn in 1979 that Ted Eayrs, Jr. was able to procure it for the Middleborough Historical Museum. For a short time, it was necessary to keep it in the basement of the Central Fire Station. After the Whistle House was moved to the museum grounds, placed on a concrete platform, and remodelled into a two-bay fire house, the Young Mechanic No. 6 was moved there, while the other bay houses a 1934 Maxim pumper that served Middleborough from 1934 to 1973. A dedication of the "Whistle House" was held on June 30, 1981.



THE HUNNEMAN hand-pumper, pictured here, is similar to Bay State No. 1, the first firefighting apparatus owned by the Middleboro Fire Department.

Middleborough Historical Museum



Featuring Tom Thumb & his lady memorabilia and collection. Museum includes seven buildings and many different collections.

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A Middleborough Printing Business

by George Barden

When the H.L. Thatcher & Co. printing business was sold to Kevin Heaslip in 1972 and moved to Wareham there came to an end an enterprise that had lasted exactly one century and extended over three generations. The business had been started as a hobby in 1872 by Henry L. Thatcher and his brother-in-law Louis K. Harlow when both were employed at the steam mill of Louis' father, Ivory Harlow. The initial success of the venture persuaded them to pursue the business on a full time basis under the name "Harlow and Thatcher's Steam Printing Office," with their plant located near Vine and West Streets opposite the railroad station. The machinery in this plant was steam driven, the steam engine outside the building driving the system of overhead pulleys and belts inside. The business was next located for a short time on the second floor of the Jenks Building at the corner of Clifford and Wareham (then Water) Streets, but upon the establishment of Thatcher's Row, Harlow & Thatcher moved the old building from Vine Street around 1880 to this new site. This was the first building to be erected on Thatcher's Row and here the business was to be located for the next nine decades.

A steam engine located in a small outbuilding still powered the maze of belts and pulleys inside the printing plant, but it was soon superseded by an electric motor. Type was set by hand and most of the other shop operations were done manually as well. Later on, each machine was powered by its own electric motor as modernization of the plant was slowly effected. About this time Louis Harlow withdrew from the business and the firm became known as the H.L. Thatcher Printing Co., the name it bore until the end.

The Thatcher family of Middleborough has its roots in the little village of Queen Camel, Somersetshire, England, which is believed by some to be the site of King Arthur's Camelot. When this writer visited Queen Camel recently the narrow streets lined by thatched cottages looked just as they must have looked four centuries ago when Anthony Thatcher plied his trade as a "taylor" there. Anthony came to America in 1634/35, finally settling in Barnstable County, where the next three generations of Thatchers resided. Allen Crocker Thatcher, the first Thatcher to settle in Middleborough, was the fifth generation from Anthony and came here from Rochester; he married Elizabeth, the daughter of Maj. Levi Peirce who founded Peirce Academy, and maintained extensive greenhouses behind his home on South Main Street opposite the Congregational Church. His son, Levi Peirce Thatcher, was a noted musician, mostly in the field of religious music. Just before the turn of the century Levi purchased from the estate of Philander Washburn the house that is now the home of the Gas & Electric Company on South Main Street and this became the home of his son, Henry L. Thatcher.

Henry's bout with scarlet fever left him totally deaf, but he overcame this handicap by becoming an expert at lip reading. When conducting business over the phone he had his pressman

Roderick Matheson speak with his customer, pretending that he was Mr. Thatcher, then form the words silently with his lips for Mr. Thatcher to read and finally relay Thatcher's reply to the unsuspecting customer. He had an impulsive temper to go with his good business sense: on one occasion, finding that an unnamed pressman was slightly drunk, he fired him on the spot. The culprit left by the back door but as he came around the building by the front door, Henry growled. "Where do you think you are going? Get in here and get to work!" Henry's son Allan had been with the business since graduating from Brown University and upon Henry's death in 1930 Allan managed the firm until 1948, when his son Ronald took over. During the next twenty-four years Ronald Thatcher managed the prosperous business, adding many state-of-the-art machines to increase the efficiency of the operation. When the business was finally sold upon Ronald Thatcher's retirement, the equipment included a Miehle Vertical Press, a Davidson offset press that could print 6,000 sheets an hour, a Lawson hydraulic cutter capable of cutting 500 sheets at once, a Ludlow typesetter and a Baum folder that could handle 18,000 pieces per hour. Typesetting was done at the building on Thatcher's Row, but much of it was farmed out to subcontractors such as the Middleborough Gazette.

The bread and butter work of H.L. Thatcher Co. consisted of printing business forms for banks, brokerage houses and the like and an office was maintained in Boston to service such customers. George Farley managed the Boston office and Arthur B. Monroe commuted every day from Middleborough

Continued on Page 10



THE THATCHER FAMILY traces its roots to the quiet English village of Queen Camel, Somersetshire, shown in this recent photo by the author. Anthony Thatcher labored as a "taylor" there until emigrating to New England around 1635.

THE NEWS LEADER

Wednesday, Jan. 18, 1912

RICHMOND, VA.

Mrs. Tom Thumb on How to Keep Young

"How do I keep young?" said Mrs. Tom Thumb yesterday, when seen at a local hotel, "why, by being happy and making others happy." And she crossed her little arms in front of her, and beamed at me with the brightest, youngest little eyes in the world. She is appearing at the Colonial theatre here all this week.

"That's all I do," she continued; "no creams, no lotions, no nothing! I am never depressed, and I am always busy — and interested, too; interested in everything going on about me in the world. I am 71 years old, but I enjoy life just as much as I ever did, and I am just as full of energy."

And after listening to her talk for twenty minutes, it was perfectly evident that she was not exaggerating in the least. The strongest feeling that you have about Mrs. Tom Thumb, after talking to her, is that she is a perfectly normal person. You almost forget her size. If you could shut your eyes you would think you were talking to a natural, bright and widely interested woman. It is the most uncanny thing about her, this perfect normality of her brain.

"Tell other women to live as I live," she said, "every faculty alert and alive, and they, too, will keep young. See," she exclaimed, in her animated little way, "I have hardly any wrinkles, no gray hairs. I use a little dry rouge when I am on the stage, because of the glare of the footlights, and I take fine care of my health; but, believe me, youth comes from the inside. It is in the heart.

Her Wrinkled Brother.

"Now, take my brother, for instance. He is four years younger than I am, and he runs my farm for me in Middleboro, Mass., where I go and rest in the summer. He is an old man, gray, wrinkled. I laugh at him, and try to stir him up when I am at home, and show him how quick I am, but he only shakes his head. He says he is old — I know I shall always keep young — with a confident toss of her tiny head — until the last days of my life.

"Maybe I shall retire from the stage some day. But it will be a long way off. When I am at home I am always restless. In the evenings I can't keep still. I love the world and love to travel, and you know, of course, that I have been in every country, practically, in the last fifty years of my life. They have been good to me everywhere, but America is the best, and, of course, it's my country you know. I am a Puritan, and was born in Massachusetts. They are slow on the other side, you see, and I like to do everything quickly. Why, I was traveling ten days in Italy to give four performances." She turned to her tiny husband, Count Magri, for confirmation of this statement, and

he nodded sagely. He had been standing by her side all the while, but he was evidently a very well-trained husband, and left all the talking to his wife.



LAVINA WARREN, born in North Middleborough, was better known as Mrs. Tom Thumb.

Long On the Stage.

She explained, in the course of the interview, that she has been on the stage since she was seventeen years old. She has been married twice, her first husband (Tom Thumb), has been dead many years. She married her second husband about twenty-five years ago. There were seven other children in her family, of which all but one sister, Minnie, were normal in stature. She has appeared before most of the crowned heads of Europe, including Queen Victoria, and will probably go abroad again this summer, but only on a pleasure trip.

Somehow, listening to her talk you feel that hers is a big soul, even if it is in a midget body.

After all, there is a little halo of romance and charm about "Mrs. Tom Thumb" to all of us. She is a wonderful, old, childish memory to almost everybody, along with "Punch and Judy," and glorious circus ladies, and Buffalo Bill, and all the rest. She is indelibly associated with the past, but here she is so much the present. And so exactly the same that you can feel again stealing over you when you see her your old childish wonder, and awe, and joy. May she live seventy years more!

— C.T.A.

A Middleborough...

to Boston as a sales representative. The printing of social calling cards, business cards, Christmas cards, school programs, the "Antiquarian," church bulletins, etc. kept the presses humming in between the large commercial orders. In the 1870's and 1880's the firm advertised in many mid-western newspapers, thus garnering a large mail order business from commercial institutions in that area. The peak years of the business came during the first two decades of the 20th century and this was when the number of employees was the greatest; the number decreased gradually as more efficient machines were employed. Some of the more recent employees include Raymond Nourse, a foreman for many years; Winsor Carver, Stanley Fowler, Wilmoth Waterman and William Casey, pressmen, and Marcus Merrick, typesetter.

There are examples of H.L. Thatcher's art in many a Middleborough home, some of these printed programs and pamphlets dating from the last century. The hard bound "History of the Church of North Middleborough" printed in 1876, old High School graduation programs and the "Antiquarians" from 1962 through 1972 are cases in point.

When, in 1972, it became time for Ronald Thatcher to retire there were no fourth generation Thatchers to take over the management of the firm, and so it was sold in its centennial year and the H.L. Thatcher Company became part of Middleborough's varied and colorful history.

R A G S.

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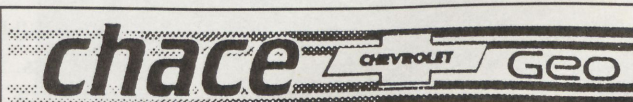


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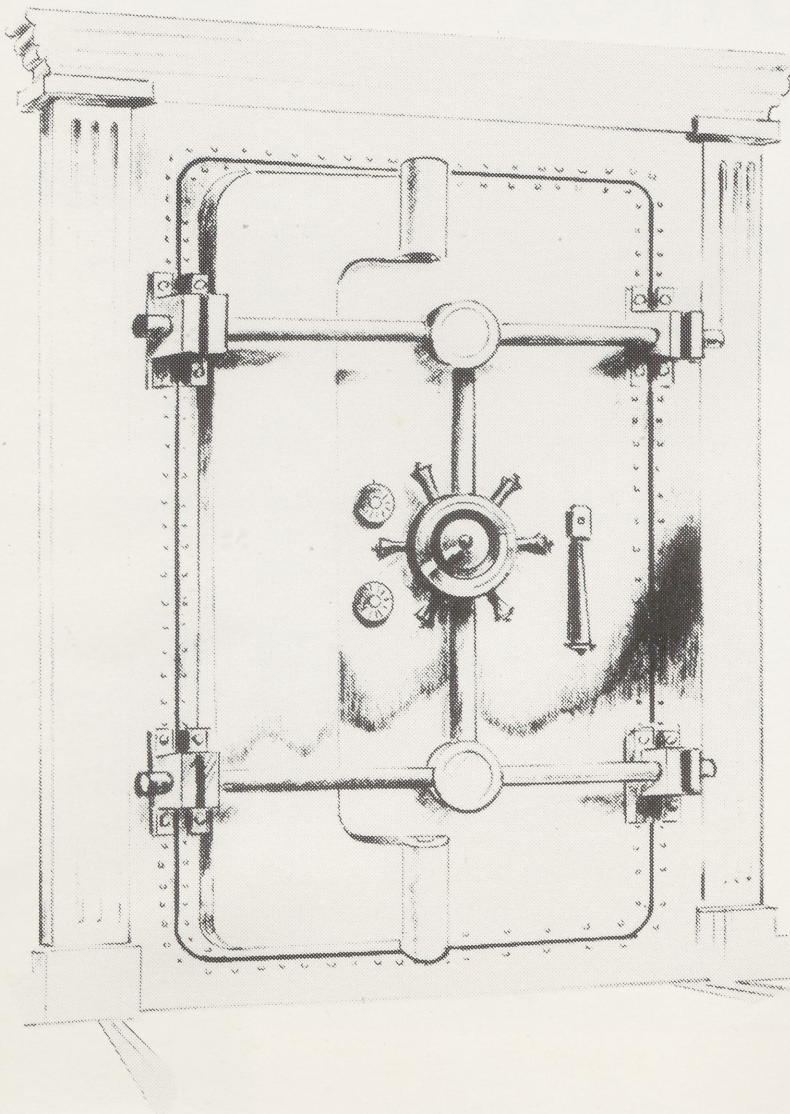
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